UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Fire Island Light Station
AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
Robert Moses Causeway
CITY, TOWN
Bay Shore
STATE
New York
CODE
36

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
OWNERSHIP
STATUS
PRESENT USE

_DISTRICT
_BUILDING(S)
_STRUCTURES
_SITE
_OBJECT
_X
PUBLIC
_PRIVATE
_BOTH

_PUBLIC ACQUISITION
_IN PROCESS
_BEING CONSIDERED

_OCCUPIED
_UNOCCUPIED
_WORK IN PROGRESS

_ACCESSIBLE
_X
YES: RESTRICTED
_YES: UNRESTRICTED
_NO

_AGRICULTURE
_COMMERCIAL
_PARK
_EDUCATIONAL
_PRIVATE RESIDENCE
_ENTERTAINMENT
_RELIGIOUS
_GOVERNMENT
_SCIENTIFIC
_INDUSTRIAL
_TRANSPORTATION
_MILITARY
_OTHER:

4 AGENCY
REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)
National Park Service, North Atlantic Region
STREET & NUMBER
15 State Street
CITY, TOWN
Boston
STATE
Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Land Acquisition Division, National Park Service, North Atlantic Region
STREET & NUMBER
15 State Street
CITY, TOWN
Boston
STATE
Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
U.S. Coast Guard, 3d Dist., "Fire Island Station Annex" Civil Plot Plan 03-5523
DATE
18 June 1975, revised 8-7-80
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
National Park Service, North Atlantic Regional Office
CITY, TOWN
Boston
STATE
Massachusetts
The Fire Island Light Station is situated 5 miles east of the western end of Fire Island, a barrier island off the southern coast of Long Island. It consists of a lighthouse and an adjacent keeper's quarters sitting on a raised terrace. The lighthouse tower, completed in 1858, is a conical tower with hyperbolic curved profile becoming cylindrical near the top. The height of the tower, from foot to cornice, is 140 feet, with an additional 24 feet to enclose the watch room and the lantern. The focal plane of the light is approximately 168 feet above sea level. The diameter of the tower at its base is 32 feet; at its top, 15 feet. The cornice is of granite and was originally in the Doric order with six pilasters, now missing or covered with concrete. It supports an iron-railed projecting gallery. The tower is constructed of brick. By 1876 it was coated with a cement wash, giving it a cream color. In 1891, it was covered with asphalt paint, overpainted with white to produce four horizontal black and white stripes. The tower was coated with reinforced concrete in 1912 and painted with the same stripes. There is a hollow central column of cast iron, which originally contained the clock weights, and a spiral staircase with cast iron open-work treads. The original light was a first order revolving catadioptric system with Fresnel lens, visible for 21-23 nautical miles from 15 feet above sea level. A Funck mechanism was installed in 1869. Whale oil was used until 1867; lard oil until 1884; mineral oil (kerosene) until 1907; incandescent oil vapor until 1939; electricity thereafter. A Western Union telegraph service was installed in 1878; telephone in 1898; wireless telegraphy experiments were conducted in 1901.

The adjacent Keeper's residence, which also contained the oil storage rooms, was completed in 1859. It was originally connected to the tower by a covered passage, now missing. The two-story building now contains thirteen rooms divided into two apartments, plus full attic and basement. It is faced with rough coursed granite. The terrace on which both structures sit is approximately 15 feet high and faced with stone, the stone coming from the first Fire Island lighthouse and keeper's house (1826). Parts of the south and east walls of the terrace were replaced in 1901. The terrace measures 148 feet north to south, by 97 feet east to west. There is a small metal shed on the northeast corner of the terrace.
The current Fire Island lighthouse was completed in 1858 to replace the first Fire Island light, which had been put into service in 1826 and whose foundation is about 200 yards southwest of the current station. In 1826, the light was at the western tip of Fire Island, adjacent to Fire Island Inlet, which connects the Atlantic Ocean with Great South Bay. Littoral drift causes Fire Island to "migrate" westward at the rate of about one mile every 25 or 30 years, so that now the site of the lighthouse is five miles east of the current inlet.

The Federal government took jurisdiction over lighthouses on August 7, 1789, in one of the earliest assertions of federal power over the powers of the separate states. The first Fire Island light was constructed during a wave of lighthouse building in the 1820's and 30's; and the second, during a wave of building and renovation in the 1850's. The ultimate goal was to make the Atlantic coast a lighted highway of commerce, and the Fire Island lights filled the gap between the Montauk Point Light to the east and the Sandy Hook Light to the west. As New York emerged as the most important American port in the transatlantic trade, the Fire Island light emerged as the most important light station on the East Coast, since it was the first landfall for ships approaching New York harbor on the Atlantic routes. A shoal about a mile off-shore was the cause of numerous shipwrecks. Thus the second Fire Island light was 80 feet taller and had a more powerful light than its predecessor and than the neighboring lights to the east and west. Its finely proportioned curved profile and its original Doric details gave it architectural distinction.

Fire Island Light Station also served important non-navigational functions in the nineteenth century, with the keeper and his assistants serving as "mayors" of Fire Island, assisting baymen, and serving as inn-keepers to rich urbanites seeking primitive recreational experiences away from the city. The Fire Island Light Station was decommissioned by the Coast Guard in 1974.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

National Archives and Record Service, Record Group 25.
Francis Ross Holland, Jr., America's Lighthouses, Their Illustrated History since 1716 (Brattleboro, Vt., 1972).

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/3

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING

NORTHING

ZONE EASTING

NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated structures occupy a site measuring approx. 148 by 97 feet and sit in a tract of 90 acres bounded on the north by Great South Bay, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the west by Robert Moses State Park, and on the east by Robert Moses State Park-East Unit.

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Steven Kesselman, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Fire Island National Seashore

DATE

April 17, 1981

STREET & NUMBER

120 Laurel Street

TELEPHONE

(516) 289-4810

CITY OR TOWN

Patchogue

STATE

New York

CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X

NO

NONE

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

L. Ross Haggerty

DATE

JUL 3, 1981

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

William K. Branden

DATE

9/1/81

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
FIRE ISLAND LIGHT STATION
Bay Shore (vicinity of), New York
Photographer: Neal R. Bullington
Date: April 11, 1980
Negative located at Fire Island National Seashore, 120 Laurel St., Patchogue, New York 11778
View: Looking northeast
Photograph No.: Suffolk Co.
FIRE ISLAND LIGHT STATION
Bay Shore (vicinity of), New York
Photographer: Neal R. Bullington
Date: October 4, 1979
Negative located at Fire Island National Seashore, 120 Laurel St., Patchogue, New York 11772
View: Looking north northwest
Photograph No.: Suffolk Co.
FIRE ISLAND LIGHT STATION
Bay Shore (vicinity of), New York
Photographer: Neal R. Bullington
Date: December 19, 1978
Negative located at Fire Island National Seashore, 120 Laurel St., Patchogue, New York 11772
View: Looking east
Photograph No.: AUG 5 1981

Suffolk Co. SEP 11 1981